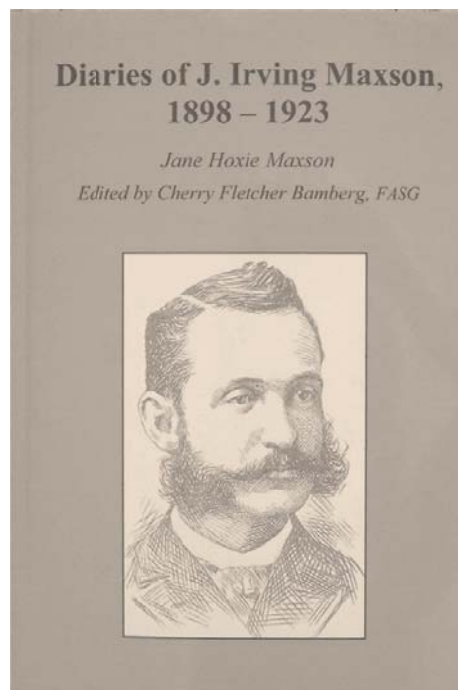


# *New Book Announcement*

*Diaries of J. Irving Maxson, 1898-1923*, by Jane Hoxie Maxson, ed. by Cherry Fletcher Bamberg, FASG. Soft cover, 368 pages, 2009. \$19.95. Available from Jane H. Maxson, 55 Wild Goose Rd. Wakefield, RI 02879 (jhm2727@cox.net) or RIGenSoc.org.

This careful transcription of the diaries of J. Irving Maxson opens the door for researchers to a new era—the early twentieth century—and a new part of Rhode Island—Westerly. The diaries are the only survivors of fifty years of diary-keeping, the rest having been lost in the 1938 Hurricane. A descendant of the Maxson family which had lived in Westerly for two hundred years, J. Irving Maxson was deeply involved with the family building company, Maxson & Co. of Westerly which built many of the grand houses, public buildings, and hotels in southern New England. He was deeply rooted in his family, community, and church. A prominent man, he took a leading role in his community, representing Westerly in the General Assembly and serving on innumerable boards. He and his family worshipped and socialized with a large group of friends and relations from the Pawcatuck Seventh Day Baptist Church in Westerly. Travel, summers at the beach, yacht racing, vaudeville—J. Irving really enjoyed life, never imagining how easily his security could slip away.



The shifting economic tides of the early twentieth century and some questionable partners brought down Maxson & Co. by 1910. The company sold, J. Irving set out to reinvent himself and did it over and over for the rest of his life. Most diaries are like a play performed with only one set and a very limited cast, but not this one. To find work J. Irving traveled to Cuba, New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut, moving his family and dwindling possessions with him. He ran a fruit plantation in Cuba, managed shipyards during World War I, skippered a steamer between Connecticut and Rhode Island, and captained a crippled ship in the Caribbean. In each of these places he was meeting new people and writing about them in his diary. Whatever misfortunes he suffered, he never gave up. It is a story of bravery and love.

A thoughtful introduction sets the scene and provides readers with an understanding of the family structure. Much patient research went into identifying many individuals named, and complete name index makes it easy to find references. Genealogists will be particularly interested in the ties that linked Sabbatarians from Westerly with those in New Jersey, Wisconsin, and upstate New York. Best of all, many unique family photographs make the people and times come to life for the reader.



*Jane Hoxie Maxson was one of the founders of the Maxson Family Association and has served as its secretary and historian. An inveterate collector of family lore and memorabilia, she has patiently transcribed these remarkable diaries from her family collection, illustrating them with unique photographs. Cherry Fletcher Bamberg, editor of Rhode Island Roots, enjoyed helping her put it all together.*